



ARDEA HERODIAS L.

PLATALEA FLAVIPES, *Gould.*

Yellow-legged Spoonbill.

Platalea flavipes, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 106 ; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

THIS species differs in so many points from the typical members of the genus *Platalea*, and has so many characters in common with the white Ibises of India and Africa, as almost to warrant its separation into a distinct genus ; its whole habits and economy, however, so closely assimilate to those of the true Spoonbills, that I am induced to retain it in the genus to which I originally assigned it. The bill and legs, although approximating to those of the Ibises, are more slightly modified than some parts of its plumage ; and it must be admitted, that in the lengthened feathers of the chest, in the flowing black plumes which fall so gracefully over the extremities of the primaries, and in the total absence at any period of the occipital plumes, it approximates very closely to the Sacred Ibis and its near allies.

The rainy and luxuriant season which followed the drought experienced in New South Wales in 1839, attracted to that part of Australia, among many other rare birds, numerous flocks of the species forming the subject of the present Plate ; in fact, so plentiful was it, that there was scarcely a brook or lagoon from the Hunter to the Lower Namoi that was not tenanted by numbers of this bird ; in most instances accompanied by Straw-necked and White Ibises (*Ibis spinicollis* and *Ibis strictipennis*). The food suitable to one species was equally so to the other, all devouring with equal avidity the thousands of aquatic insects, small-shelled mollusks, &c., which the rains had apparently called into being.

I particularly mention its occurrence at this period, as I had not observed a single example during a previous visit to the same districts, when the whole face of the country presented as sad a spectacle of sterility as could well be imagined. Over what extent of Australia this fine bird will hereafter be found to range it is impossible to conjecture ; as yet I have never received a specimen from any other part than New South Wales.

In disposition I found it shy and distrustful, and it was not without a considerable degree of caution and manœuvring that I could ever approach sufficiently near to make a successful shot. I have occasionally met with it singly, but more frequently in pairs or in small companies of from six to eight. When not occupied in procuring food, which they do while skirting the edge of the lagoon, or by wading knee-deep among the grasses and rushes, they may be seen reposing on the dead branches of the highest trees growing near the water, frequently standing on one leg, with the head drawn back and the bill resting on the breast ; when thus situated, an approach sufficiently near to procure specimens is almost impossible.

The sexes exhibit no external differences, and are only to be distinguished by dissection ; the female is, however, rather smaller than her mate.

The whole of the plumage is pure white, with the exception of the outer webs of the tertiaries, which are black ; face white, entirely devoid of feathers, and bounded posteriorly by a narrow line of black ; bill primrose-yellow, passing into fleshy pink at the base ; irides straw-white ; legs and feet yellow ; nails black.

The figure is that of a male rather more than half the natural size.